

Brighter Futures For Children: Fostering Service

Brighter Futures For Children

Reading Borough Council, Bridge Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2LU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was registered in January 2019. The agency was formerly part of Reading Borough Council and is now part of Brighter Futures for Children Limited.

The agency offers mainstream, short- and long-term, emergency, parent and child and 'connected persons' placements.

There are currently 92 fostering households, of which 75 are mainstream foster carers and 17 are 'connected persons' (i.e. 'family and friends').

There are 79 children placed with the agency.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 February 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Inconsistent and ineffective management oversight has compromised the overall well-being of a small minority of children. Despite this, most children's needs are met by foster carers who provide them with the care, stability and security they need to make progress. Children benefit from the trusting relationships they build and maintain with their foster carers.

In a few cases, the relationship between children and their foster carers is less positive and has resulted in the need for children to move on. Some of the recordings show less sensitive care towards those children who present often with difficult and challenging behaviours.

Agency records are not consistently maintained to a high standard and do not always reflect the actions taken by foster carers and staff to promote children's welfare. Gaps in the recording of staff's and foster carers' supervision have resulted in a lack of transparency in relation to the decision-making processes. Examples of inaccurate recording of names and gender demonstrate insensitivity towards children in terms of their identity and diversity. Recording in one child's records demonstrated unnecessary intrusiveness and disregard for the child's right to privacy. Poor management oversight has resulted in a failure to identify and address the quality and inconsistency in recording practices.

Wherever possible, children's placements are planned and the children are able to meet their foster carers before they move in. However, they are not currently given introductory information about the carers before they meet them. This means that potential opportunities to reduce children's anxiety are missed.

Foster carers and agency staff know the children well. Most have experienced an opportunity to build trusting relationships and feel secure in their foster homes. As a result, most children are making progress and engage in a range of activities in the community.

Foster carers manage contact with relatives and friends effectively. They assist with transport and supervising visits, and make appropriate effort to get to know family members.

Professionals describe the agency as friendly, with helpful workers who communicate well. Representatives from the agency always attend important meetings about children.

Most children make positive progress. They are healthy and are making progress in their education. They are growing in confidence and maturity and demonstrate improved resilience and self-esteem.

Children learn age-appropriate independent living skills. They learn to budget, save and manage their money. Young people have the opportunity to remain with their foster carers into adulthood under 'Staying Put' arrangements. Some children who have moved on maintain their relationships with foster carers, which provides them with valued ongoing support.

There are regular opportunities for children to express their views. Some children attend the Children in Care Council, and others are supported to express their views through social events, questionnaires and written and verbal feedback. The impact of this is not apparent, and the agency is unable to sufficiently demonstrate how the voices of the children are incorporated into the overall service design and improvement.

Complaints records do not all show that complaints have been responded to appropriately. One child was not provided with an appropriate response to his complaint for several weeks. Managers did not take sufficient steps to ensure that this child's views were either valued or heard.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Poor management oversight has failed to identify the areas of agency practice that are not compliant with the relevant regulations and statutory guidance. This has the potential to compromise the safety and welfare of children.

Foster carers have a sound understanding of risk, but some risk management plans are weak and do not provide sufficiently detailed strategies to support carers in minimising the identified risks at the time of placement.

Matching processes are not robust, with insufficient consideration given to the risks that children may pose to each other. In addition, risk assessments are not routinely updated in the light of new information or concerns. As a result, some individual safer care plans do not fully address the risks to children nor the steps to be taken in order to reduce these.

The agency supports foster carers to enable children to take age-appropriate risks, recognising that children need to develop and equip themselves for independence.

Staff recruitment records do not clearly evidence that all checks are in place prior to employment. Numerous staff members had no overall candidate approval in line with the agency policy, demonstrating a lack of management oversight of recruitment processes. One staff member had only one written reference.

Leaders and managers do not consistently inform Ofsted of all notifiable events. This practice does not enable Ofsted to have effective regulatory oversight.

There is evidence that the agency works in partnership with other professionals in an effort to reduce the risk-taking behaviour of children, with particular regard to going missing from care. There are no major concerns regarding children going missing or

being at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation. When there have been cases of children having unauthorised absences, these have been appropriately managed. When there is an immediate safeguarding concern, agency actions are timely and appropriate. There is a good relationship with the local safeguarding personnel.

Staff also undertake at least one unannounced visit every year to foster carers' homes.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

This agency has faced significant challenges and changes in the past 12 months. This has included numerous changes of staff, leaders and managers. A dedicated registered manager understands the strengths of the agency and the areas for development. She has a clear vision for the service and has begun to drive some improvement. However, the service is currently operating with a significantly diminished management team, resulting in a lack of capacity on the part of the registered manager to sufficiently maintain oversight of the service.

The agency has been operating without due regard to some of the underpinning legal framework of regulations, standards and guidance. This has resulted in the failure on the part of leaders and managers to appropriately transfer foster carers into the agency.

The fostering panel is not working effectively at present. The panel minutes do not accurately reflect the discussions taking place within panel meetings and do not provide adequate reasoning for recommendations made. At present, the panel is not able to fulfil its quality assurance function, and this is an area which would support foster carers' training and skills.

The agency decision maker has not demonstrated due regard for the Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM (2009) principle, detailed in the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services.

The agency has recruited a social worker to undertake foster carers' annual reviews. Review reports detail foster carers' experience, learning and areas for development. The views of foster carers, children and other professionals are intrinsic in the reports and provide an excellent platform on which supervising social workers can support and develop the foster carers' knowledge and skills.

Details of supervisory visits with foster carers are not always put on the agency's electronic monitoring system. This also applies to written records of staff supervision. The service is let down by the lack of paperwork to evidence good practice, inconsistent application of the regulations and poor management oversight. Staff supervision and appraisal systems are not implemented effectively for all staff.

The quality assurance system does not fully meet regulatory requirements. Staff regularly seek feedback from children, foster carers and placing social workers. However, this information is not reflected in plans to develop the service.

Furthermore, there is insufficient monitoring and reporting and analysis of all Schedule 6 matters.

The agency has a clear statement of purpose, which outlines its aims and objectives. The children's guides are comprehensive and conducive to the needs of their audience. The guide for younger children is sensitively written, and foster carers support younger children well to understand their situation.

The responsible individual and registered manager are determined to ensure that the agency moves forward in the best interests of children and foster carers. Both have experience of the fostering task and have embarked on a steep learning curve about the fostering regulations.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>With specific reference to ensuring that issues of equality and diversity are well managed.</p>	31/03/2020
<p>Consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (3)(e))</p> <p>With specific reference to individual safer caring policies that are comprehensive and cover all known risks.</p>	31/03/2020
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under Regulation 6 (3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3))</p> <p>With specific reference to ensuring that risk assessments are available to foster parents when a child is placed with them.</p>	31/03/2020
<p>Ensure that all persons employed by the agency receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p>	31/03/2020
<p>A fostering panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24 (2))</p>	31/03/2020

<p>With specific reference to ensuring that fostering panel minutes contain the detail required.</p>	
<p>Within 16 weeks of the date on which the old agency ceases carrying out the functions of a fostering agency, the fostering service provider in relation to a new fostering service ("the new fostering service provider") must, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, carry out an assessment of any foster parent for whom it has assumed responsibility by virtue of Regulation 33 (2) or (3) (a "transferred foster parent") and decide whether to approve them as a foster parent, in accordance with the provisions of Regulations 26 and 27, with the modification that Regulation 27 (1) does not apply.</p> <p>The transferred foster parent's approval by the old agency is terminated— when the new fostering service provider make their decision under Regulation 27 (8), (9)(b) or (10) (as the case may be), or subject to paragraph (3), if the new fostering service provider fail to carry out the assessment and make their decision within the period of 16 weeks referred to in paragraph (1). (Regulation 34 (1)(2))</p>	<p>31/03/2020</p>
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organization, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(2)(3))</p>	<p>31/03/2020</p>
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table.</p> <p>Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing.</p>	<p>31/03/2020</p>

(Regulation 36 (1)(2))	
<p data-bbox="204 282 480 315">Statutory Guidance</p> <p data-bbox="204 360 1075 510">Ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM (2009) (Volume 4 Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Section 5.40)</p> <p data-bbox="204 555 1038 705">With specific reference to ensuring that the reasons for recommendations of the fostering panel and the decisions taken by the agency decision maker are fully recorded and consider the above guidance.</p>	<p data-bbox="1109 282 1278 315">31/03/2020</p>

Recommendations

- The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (National Minimum Standard 14.7)
- The fostering service provider’s decision maker makes a considered decision that takes into account all of the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. (National Minimum Standard 14.9)
- All people working in or for the fostering service, and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a fostering panel, are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references. (National Minimum Standard 19.1)

This applies to the recruitment officer ensuring that pre-employment checks are completed.
- Foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio, which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. (National Minimum Standard 20.4)
- Payments of allowances and any fees paid are made promptly at the agreed time and foster carers are provided with a statement of payment at the end of each tax year. (National Minimum Standard 28.2)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2502331

Registered provider: Brighter Futures For Children

Registered provider address: Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, Berkshire
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Inspectors

Jacqueline Georghiou, Ofsted Inspector
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